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EDITOR'S PICK TOPICAL ALERT FEATURED

Mead residents demand answers about efforts to clean up AltEn at town hall

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Mead residents ask questions to a group of panelists during a town hall regarding the AltEn ethanol plant Monday at the Mead Covenant Church.

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MEAD — A few miles north of AltEn, the ethanol plant believed responsible for contaminating the Saunders County countryside with pesticides, residents of Mead are demanding answers.

What is being done to clean up the tens of thousands of tons of wet distiller's grains left stinking at the facility, or the poisoned wastewater left to fester in the lagoons?

Why has it taken citizens and scientists to draw to discover the systemic pesticide pollution and a news outlet in Europe to give it the attention it deserved?

Where are the officials from the plant, or the seed companies that sent their discarded product to the village of 500 people for years without much of a care for what happened to it?

Is anyone going to study what happens to the animals, the humans, the children?

Where are the state and local elected leaders, the Natural Resources District, the Environmental Protection Agency?

Does anyone care what happens to Mead, Nebraska?

A panel hosted Monday night by Bold Nebraska, the Nebraska Chapter of the Sierra Club, Nebraska Conservation Voters and Nebraska Communities United gave what answers are known so far.

Local residents Jody Weible and Paula Dyas told of their effort trying to bring attention to the products coming out of AltEn to the Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy but to little avail.

Janece Molhoff of Ashland recounted the gaps in Nebraska's regulations governing clean water as determined by a study done by the League of Women Voters.

Agricultural journalist Leesa Zalesky gave an overview of the history of AltEn, including the 2007 bankruptcy and relaunch of the ethanol plant near Mead in 2015, which led to a host of environmental issues.

And researchers Judy Wu-Smart, an entomologist at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and John Schalles, a biologist at Creighton University, previewed the upcoming efforts to put a scale on the problem.

All of that was well and good, the roughly 60 people in attendance said, about half of them from Mead.

"We want real answers," said Larry Moody, who lives on the southern edge of Mead. "We've been forgotten and left out."

His wife Carrie described developing health issues and pondered if they could be related to the emissions coming from the plant.

Others also spoke of worsening health issues. About a dozen or so raised their hand when former state Sen. Al Davis, who moderated the event, asked if anyone knew someone who believed they were sick from living close to the plant.

Cody Morris told of how his family have developed chronic sinus infections after moving to Mead a few years ago, never having experienced them before.

"When do we the people stop this?" Morris asked to applause.

Dave Domina, an attorney from Omaha, urged the residents of Mead and Saunders County to stay organized and continue working together for making a change.

That's what got beer sales stopped in Whiteclay, Domina said, and that's what can draw attention and resources to Mead.

He also urged people to contact Nebraska Attorney General Doug Peterson, who has the authority to request the EPA come in and investigate the site for cleanup.

At the end of 2 1/2 hours, Weible, who has organized efforts to draw attention to the plant dating back to 2018, collected the emails and phone numbers of those interested to form a citizen's committee.

"We're going to use it to call who we have to," she said.



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Photos: Mead ethanol plant

Mead AltEn Ethanol plant